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Covert CIA network urged in Philippines

By James McGregor
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WASHINGTON — Sen. Dave Durenberger, R-Minn., said Friday that he is urging the CIA to place clandestine agents in the Philippines because he doesn't believe the regime of President Ferdinand Marcos can survive much longer.

Durenberger said he is concerned about preventing the Philippines from taking the same course as Nicaragua and Iran, where the CIA had no established spy networks after communists ousted Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza and Islamic fundamentalists overthrew Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

But "it may be too late" to establish such a network in the Philippines, Durenberger said, in the face of growing civilian unrest and gathering strength among communist insurgents.

Durenberger, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said CIA officials are reluctant to plant agents in the Philippines because Marcos won't allow it and because the Reagan administration doesn't want to operate agents behind his back.

"Our problem there very simply is that because Marcos is our friend, because Marcos is a tough guy, we don't have in place any aftershock capacity," Durenberger said. "... If Marcos went down tomorrow, we're in trouble."

He said that during the August congressional recess, the intelligence panel sent staff members to the Philippines to prepare a "damage assessment" report on the situation the United States will face if the 67-year-old dictator falls.

The panel is scheduled to review

that report next week as part of its efforts to get American intelligence agencies to establish a "crash program" to prepare for such things as the potential fall of Marcos and other embattled U.S. allies.

The U.S. intelligence agencies now believe their responsibilities are limited to warning U.S. policymakers about the situation facing such allies, letting the politicians address the problems, Durenberger said.

Because of the situation's urgency, Durenberger said, the CIA should figure a way to "put some people in place now" even if Marcos objects.

As an example of how little the U.S. intelligence community has focused on the Philippines, Durenberger said that the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency currently has only two employees who speak Tagalog, the language in the hill country where the estimated 20,000 communist guerrillas have strongholds.

At a recent hearing, Durenberger said, a top DIA official conceded that employees who speak Tagalog are offered the lowest reenlistment bonuses of any language specialists.

Street demonstrations by middle-class Filipinos and military raids by communists have increased in the Philippines, an archipelago of about 53 million people at the tip of Southeast Asia, since Marcos' chief rival, former Sen. Benigno Aquino Jr., was killed as he returned from exile two years ago.

But Marcos has refused to relinquish or share power.